

(Fort Lauderdale, FL) Today, Congressman Alcee L. Hastings (D-Miramar) expressed sadness upon learning of the death of Dennis Koehler, who died Sunday evening at the age of 69 following a battle with melanoma. Mr. Koehler was a former Commissioner in Palm Beach County and had been a lifelong champion of veterans' rights after serving two tours in Vietnam.

"South Florida has lost a true hero with the passing of Dennis Koehler. Dennis served our nation courageously during the war in Vietnam. After coming home to Palm Beach County, he ran for and was elected to a seat on the Palm Beach County Commission. During those eight years, he selflessly worked to help improve the lives of Palm Beach County citizens. He was well-known for his compassion and dedication to the community.

"Additionally, Dennis was a major advocate for veterans' rights. He is one of the founding members of Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) and served on VVA's first National Board of Directors from 1983 to 1985. A veteran himself, Dennis understood the importance of taking care of those who have served our nation with dignity and respect.

"As an attorney in private practice, Dennis had earned the gratitude of veterans throughout Florida by using his legal skills to fight for their rights and benefits. Two years ago, when one of my constituents lost his pension following a road accident, Dennis volunteered his time and knowledge to work with my Congressional office to have the Department of Veterans' Affairs reinstate my constituent's benefits.

"Dennis' activism on this tragic issue prompted me to introduce the *Veterans Pensions Protection Act* to ensure that veterans, and their surviving spouses and children, will never again face the threat of losing their pensions because they received payments to cover expenses incurred after an accident. I wish to dedicate the *Veterans Pensions Protection Act* in honor of Dennis Koehler for his lifetime commitment and service to this nation.

"Dennis was a true patriot, a community leader, and an outstanding American. I am deeply saddened by his passing, which is more than a personal loss for just myself, but also a loss to the South Florida community."

Congressman Alcee L. Hastings serves as Senior Member of the House Rules Committee, Ranking Democratic Member of the U.S. Helsinki Commission, and Democratic Chairman of the Florida Delegation.

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